'Osteopathic physician' defines our identity

Behind every name or label lies an idea, or an understanding. A misnomer, then, creates a misunderstanding. Certainly, this logic played some part in the resolution adopted by the House of Delegates of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) on July 20, 1960:

Be it resolved, that the American Osteopathic Association institute a policy, both officially in our publications and individually on a conversational basis, to use the terms osteopathic medicine in place of the word osteopathy and osteopathic physician and surgeon in place of osteopath; the words osteopathy and osteopath being reserved for historical, sentimental, and informal discussions only.

The AOA publications have followed the mandate of the profession in the use of the preferred terminology. Osteopathy and osteopath are considered by many to be restrictive, because they are commonly equated with manipulative treatment only. Structural diagnosis and manipulative treatment are a means of expressing some of the basic concepts of osteopathic medicine but do not define it. Nonetheless, many individuals may think that the term osteopathy suggests restricted privileges and limited training.

The misapprehension that DOs have limited training and should have their practice privileges restricted was a consideration of early osteopathic physicians. In fact, as early as January 1902, the JAOA reported, “From what has been said the conclusion is inevitable that we are, properly speaking, medical practitioners and that we hold a coordinate rank with other schools of medicine.”

We osteopathic physicians are understandably irritated to read so often in the lay press and in professional publications, the terms, physicians and osteopaths and doctors and osteopaths. Whether used by detractors in a pejorative context, or as a contraction for osteopathic physician, the aforementioned terms are confusing. The public may infer from the juxtaposition of these two terms that we are not physicians. We are, and have been from the beginning, the osteopathic medical profession. We are osteopathic physicians.

As George W. Northup, DO, wrote, “More modern terminology relating to our profession will gain acceptance if we, ourselves, make use of it. At every opportunity, osteopathic physicians should urge correct professional identification, remembering that we cannot expect to be identified properly so long as we fail to identify ourselves properly.”

The terms osteopath and osteopathy were honorably retired more than 30 years ago and do not accurately reflect who we are today. As such, it is up to us to communicate who we are, not only by identifying ourselves properly in the written and spoken word, but also by our work.

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Editor in Chief

References
1. Booth ER: Relation of osteopathy to the medical profession and to the people. JAOA 1902;1:89-98.

Correction: CME home certification
In error, the Answer sheet and application for the July 1993 CME quiz appeared on page 874 of the August issue of JAOA. That page should have contained the CME home certification form. Readers wishing to apply for CME credit for reading the August issue of JAOA should photocopy the form that appears on page 959 of this issue, note clearly that it is for the August issue, and submit the photocopy with the form for this, the September 1993, issue of JAOA.